



European
Commission



Erasmus+ Programme

Erasmus Mundus Programme Implementation in the Context of COVID-19

(Academic year 2020 – 2021)

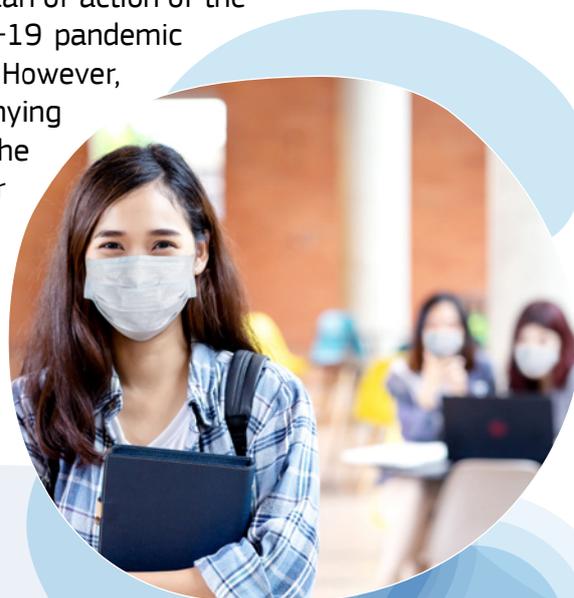
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The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the Erasmus Mundus programme and participating Higher Education Institutions, students and scholars. In this context, the European Commission and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) put in place several supporting measures. The objective was to provide a coordinated and consistent operating framework for Erasmus Mundus consortia, to minimise disruptions of mobility and activities, and to apply a flexible approach for programme management under these force majeure circumstances.

The supporting measures comprised two surveys carried out by EACEA in May and October 2020 in order to gather quantitative and qualitative data from Erasmus Mundus consortia on insights from the programme implementation level, the expected impact, and the envisaged scenarios for the academic year 2020-2021. The first survey (May 2020) on “Erasmus Mundus Programme Implementation in the Context of COVID-19” addressed 176 EMJMD consortia selected between 2015 and 2019. The results of this survey were published in a [report](#), which summarises the experiences, difficulties, solutions and good practices in the context of COVID-19, shared by the Erasmus Mundus consortia. The follow-up survey (October 2020) was addressed to 164 EMJMD consortia still running at that time (including the new 2020 generation). Through this second survey, quantitative data was collected on the scenarios finally implemented by the consortia as well as the situation of the students.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to illustrate briefly the status and plan of action of the EMJMD consortia in light of the current sanitary crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly had consequences on the Erasmus Mundus projects. However, EMJMD consortia put in place mitigating measures and – without denying the difficulties – are confident about their capacity to overcome the obstacles imposed in the COVID-19 context and to reach their objectives by the end of their projects.

While challenged by the crisis, the interdisciplinary Erasmus Mundus programmes cover a wide range of academic fields, which can be mobilised in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, by focusing their research on COVID-19 related questions, numerous Erasmus Mundus programmes, with their highly skilled academics, researchers and students from all over the world, can contribute to overcoming the current health and humanitarian crisis.



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Problems encountered by Erasmus Mundus consortia

At the time of the first survey (May 2020), the consortia's main concerns were linked to the future development of the COVID-19 crisis, directly affecting national visa and travel restrictions. The modifications that consortia were forced to make to their programmes impacted their very nature and attractiveness (e.g. a temporary switch to online teaching and learning). The safety, health, wellbeing and study progress of the students have been at the centre of the consortia's attention. Moreover, the uncertainty related to the development of the situation and the continuous changes in the national regulations and policies has resulted in additional pressure for both consortia and students.

The survey allowed the identification of the following main areas of concern for the consortia:

- **Visa and travel restrictions** caused delays in the programme implementation.
- **Student services** needed to be adapted. This concerned in particular enrolment, accommodation, the opening of a bank account, and the induction activities for students who could not arrive on time in the consortium countries.
- **Health and safety** measures for students and staff were implemented, including support to students suffering from stress and discouragement.
- **The nature and attractiveness of the EMJMD** in an online setting was impacted. Intercultural exchange, mobility, lab sessions and interaction with other students, staff and the world of work constitute the core as well as the main attractive elements of the EMJMDs.
- **The teaching methodology** (online teaching and learning) presented didactic and logistical challenges for consortia striving to ensure the outstanding quality of the courses and the achievement of the learning objectives. Moreover, not all students resided in the same time zone or had access to adequate IT equipment/connection.
- **Visiting scholars and staff mobility** was negatively impacted due to travel restrictions or unavailability of visiting scholars for online lectures.
- **Course administration** faced several concerns of different nature:
 - **Logistics**: reorganization of mobility and course schedule, student selection and conversion of procedures for online examinations and thesis defence.
 - **Scholarship management**, in relation to students unable to reach the consortium countries.
 - **Financial**: decreasing number of self-funded students or deferral of their application.

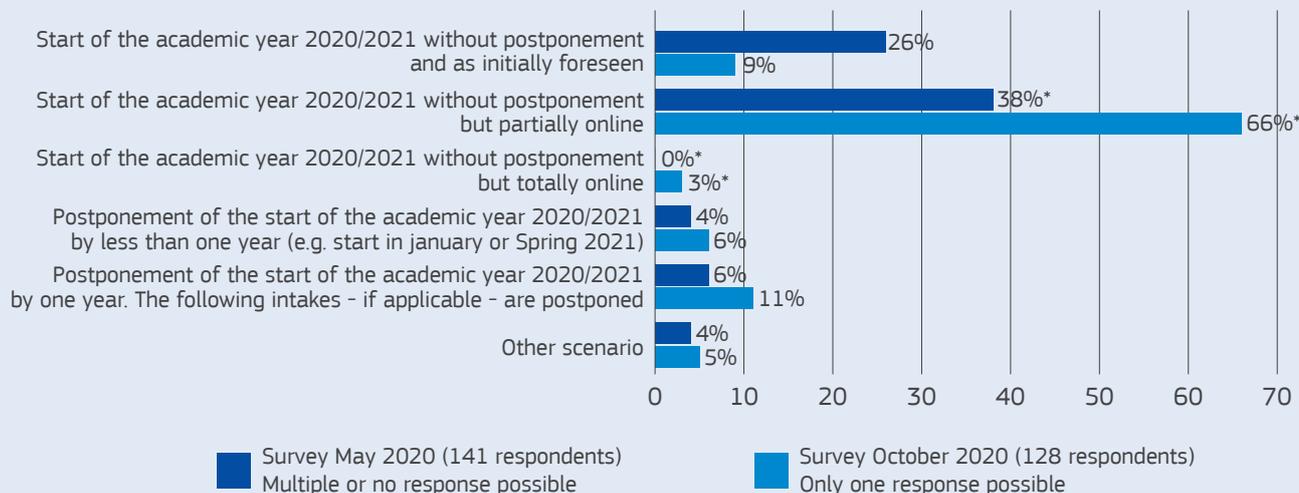
Scenarios envisaged and implemented by EMJMD consortia (academic year 2020/2021)

In the May 2020 survey, EMJMD consortia were asked to indicate which scenario(s) they envisaged for the academic year 2020/2021. Most consortia indicated their intention of starting the academic year as foreseen: 26% had already taken the first steps towards the onsite implementation of the programme and 38% towards online teaching and learning. Only 10% of the respondents were planning to postpone the academic year 2020/2021 by one year or less. None of the respondents was considering an early termination or reduction of the programme scope, but they were rather exploring possible solutions to ensure the continuity of the programmes and achievement of the learning objectives.

The follow-up October survey showed that nearly 10% of the consortia decided to proceed as initially foreseen, while the remaining 90% had to make adjustments to the initially planned course implementation. Only 17% of the respondents indicated the decision of postponing their academic year by one year or less.

When comparing the first steps taken by the consortia towards specific scenarios in May 2020 and the implemented scenarios indicated in the October 2020 survey, a significant shift towards digital alternatives (about 70% of EMJMD programmes) was observed. Only 3% of the respondents opted for a totally online delivery while the remaining consortia still implemented at least some onsite components at the beginning of the academic year 2020/2021.

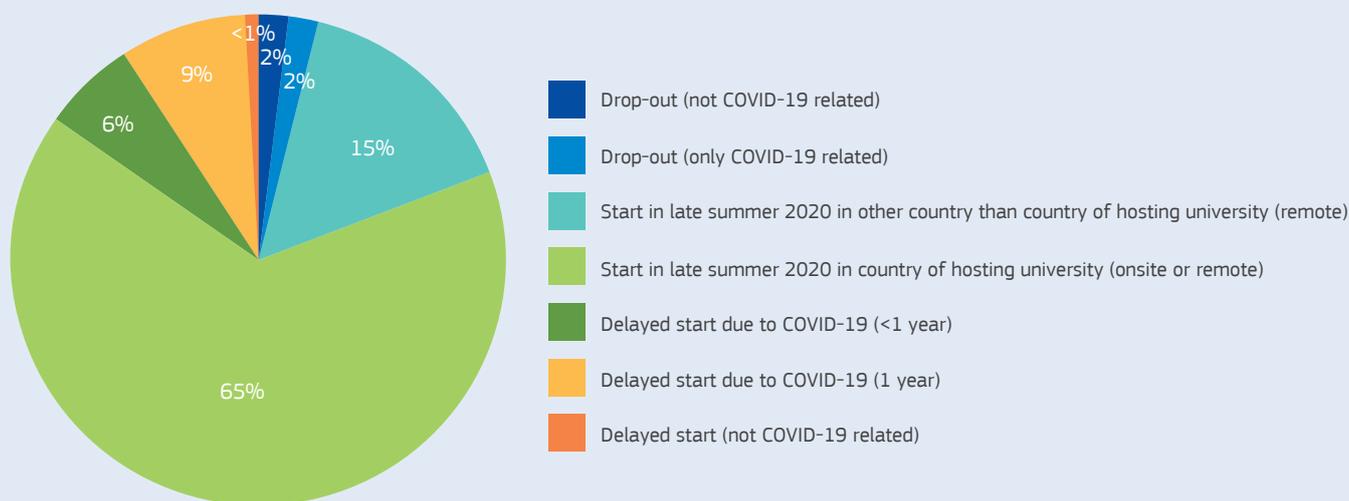
Figure 1: Scenarios envisaged by EMJMD consortia for the academic year 2021/2021 (May 2020) compared to scenarios implemented (October 2020)



*Distinction partially/totally online added in the survey October 2020

Impact on the students

Figure 2: COVID-19 impact on EMJMD students - Start of the academic year 2020/2021



Data from Follow-up-survey - October 2020
>5800 students (scholarship and non-scholarship holders)

While highlighting the impact of the sanitary crisis on the student population, the October survey showed that most of the participants (65% of the total students) arrived at the beginning of the academic year 2020/2021 in the country of the hosting university and started the courses either onsite or through digital means. Another 15% of students was able to start remotely in late summer 2020 from a different country than the one of the hosting institution. Around 15% of the students postponed their study by one year or less, but only 2% dropped-out due to COVID-19 related issues.

Experiences and good practices put in place by Erasmus Mundus consortia

EMJMD consortia reacted to the sanitary crisis with great creativity and commitment in the search of solutions aimed at ensuring the continuity of the programmes for their students. Furthermore, they took this challenge as a learning opportunity for developing online opportunities and upgrading their tools. Moreover, the consortia reported positively on the motivation, collaboration, and commitment of their students. Depending on the needs and specific context, the consortia implemented various combinations of the below measures:

- **Visa applications and travel restrictions:** support was provided through formal documents, assistance in travel arrangements, or surveys monitoring the students' situation.
- **Student services:** due to COVID-19, the services provided by the consortia were extended to social aspects, health, well-being, financial aspects, access to computer equipment and internet, and specific housing assistance.
- **Health and safety of students and staff:** the universities were regularly in contact with students through different online channels, both in individual and group sessions; websites with COVID-19 related information were introduced.
- **Nature and attractiveness of the Erasmus Mundus programmes:** innovative solutions were adopted, e.g. induction weeks covering multiple time zones, postponement of onsite sessions to later semesters, and addition of creative activities and catch-up opportunities.
- **Teaching methodology (online teaching and learning):** innovation and skills were enhanced thanks to the exchange of good practices with the consortium partners, online learning platforms with multiple functions, training and development opportunities for students and staff and online contributions by visiting scholars.
- **Course Administration**
 - **Logistics:** more flexibility was given in relation to the mobility path, the academic calendar as well as internships.
 - **Scholarship management and student selection:** alternatives to language certifications, deferral of enrolment were introduced.
 - **Financial:** support in terms of fee weavers was available for additional semesters needed due to COVID-19 related issues; ad hoc complementary financial support was provided by consortia from their own resources to cover student unexpected costs.